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## The Mute in the Shadow in the Distance:

### Towards a New “Oriental Femininism”

#### LA MUETTE AU LOIN DANS L'OMBRE:

#### VERS UN NOUVEAU FÉMININISME "ORIENTAL"

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**Abstract:** *Ruan Lingyu* as a film illustrating “women as women” as real women denies radical Feminism of film studies to remarkable degree: there’s no sexual appeal, thus no “male gaze” in sense of humiliating females; there is persecution of patriarchy, yet what finally leaves her no choice other than death is that the three men she loves would not give her real love in return. Though the woman is in “center stage” position, as if “the whole sky”, she’s especially unhappy. And, how striking her beauty, silence, endurance, her will are, even and especially in the distance in the shadow. Here the “Oriental” Femininism is in fact for the mute among all the women in this world, for those who never pronounce anger and resistance, because their happiness lies not simply in “equality”, “liberation”, but in “love”, no matter in the “first” or “second” or “third” world they are.

**Key words:** Oriental Femininism; Subject; Object; Aesthetics of femininity

**Resumé:** *Ruan Lingyu* est un film qui illustre “les femmes en tant que femmes». Les vraies femmes dénie le féminisme radical. Il n’y a pas d’appel sexuel, donc pas de “regard masculin” dans le sens de l’humiliation des femmes; il y a une persécution du patriarcat, mais ce qui l’a finalement privée des choix de vivre sont les trois hommes qu’elle aime, et qui ne lui donnerait pas leur véritable amour en retour. Bien que la femme est dans la position de “la scène centrale”, elle est particulièrement malheureuse. Et malgré sa beauté fulgurante, son silence, son endurance et sa volonté sont, même et surtout au loin dans l’ombre. Ici le féminisme “oriental” est pour la muette parmi toutes les femmes dans le monde, pour celles qui ne prononcent jamais leur colère et résistance, parce que leur bonheur ne réside pas simplement dans “l’égalité”, dans la “libération”, mais dans “l’amour”, peu importe qu’elles sont dans le premier, deuxième ou tiers monde.

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**Mots-clés:** féminisme oriental; sujet; objet; esthétique de la féminité

Where to go, she, upward, downward? Downstairs is the “Tea King” Tang, so-called a “devil playing with women”, now enamored with her, whereas upstairs are a group of young film-making artists representing modernization, progress, resistance, spirit of fighting. She walks, one step down, hesitates, turns around, then walks up, three steps, she hesitates, halts, she turns to look at the giant window in the wall, she stops there. The luminous window light shines on her. She does not belong to anywhere, she belongs to the window, the light here: her own soul of a pilgrim. Quiet, soundless. Only her figure inlaid in the light, with the slender beauty, svelte, willowy, extremely gentle and peaceful. Inside the light of the “center stage”, her figure is dim and faint. This is a picture predestinate of her tragic destiny, meanwhile demonstrating her independent moral beauty of style.

The film starts with the shot of an old-styled bath house in 1929 in Shanghai: an absolutely manly world, overwhelmed with hot steam, men’s noise, a singing voice lingering: “...butterfly, flying...” a quite sad tone. A group of men, film producers, directors, nearly naked, are scheming the future of an actress, Ruan Lingyu, are commanding the male fantasy of film<sup>2</sup>. It seems as if a phallogocentric space, a new deformed patriarchic economy. A male actor even claims he will “take ‘it’ out to compare with others’”. Men are easy with their own phallogocentric discourse. Nevertheless, there is one director in a western suit in sharp contrast with the showing bodies, articulating a quite modernized tune; also, the men are trying to “change” Ruan from her former roles of “bad women” to a “noble lady”, to “make her big” by making her a chaste girl singer, and then a saint mother who bites her finger to feed her baby with her own blood. So far, Ruan is to be emancipated and nothing is to offend the Feminists.

## A “HOME”

Ruan first appears in a modernized film studio, being shot and being “mute”, as just the center of the screen. She then in the next scene is in a hotel, where no “decent” or “happy-living” woman was supposed to be at that time in China: all women were supposed to be at home. This is quite symbolic for two reasons: first, Ruan as a professional actress is excluded from the category of “home”, “家”; she is a “new woman”; second, she has nobody to marry, thus she has no “home”, while for her, “home” has especially for her super significance. The Chinese character for a woman to get married is “嫁”, meaning exactly marriage for a woman is getting herself a “home”.

She’s in the hotel for making snow scenes and there is the snow: outside the window it’s snowing heavily, and the cold color and darkness inside make the hotel a more unbearable “cold” domicile other than “home”: the impressive and expressionist darkness is typical of the film’s lighting schemes. The prevailing contrast between shadow and light pronounces deliberately her position at the “center stage”. The vast majority of the space is shadow, darkness, so forceful that it cannot be got rid of; meanwhile she is clear, pure, like a virgin. She is never in the Freudian sense a “dark continent”; she is transparent. There is always strong spot light shining on her face: you cannot tell whether it’s the light or in fact her face shines. Such a glistening face! And there is the snow scene, for snow’s implication of “being intelligible” and chaste, of female virtues. She cannot stand the coldness, her hands together before chest as if making prayer, and she is praying: the coldness of the hotel denotes the lack of and desire for “home”, and, a “man” exactly. The mute speaks.

There is the female discourse centered around man and children. She longs for a family where even she’s nurturing all the members. When she’s home, she peeps inside at the window, warm-tuned light shining on her face, enjoying watching her mother taking care of Xiaoyu and xiaoyu playing. She’s like an outsider. Light shines on her face with sweetness and sadness, also glitters in her perceiving eyes. She stays outside and peeps for she understands that’s not a real “home” for her, not a complete one, at least. Then the three women sit at the round dinner table, which symbolizes family reunion in traditional China, yet there are

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<sup>2</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989. p. 20.

only women. When her mother is replacing the electric bulb, Ruan holds her mother and Xiaoyu comes to hold her. It's the extremely touching scene of three women of three generations holding each other, in support of and cherishing each other in the darkness. They need a man.

A man finally comes, standing in the courtyard, smiling idly. Ruan steps from upstairs down to meet him. She's bought him present, a ring. She puts the ring on his finger while he leans in her breast, they together looking at the ring. He turns into a child, she a nurturing mother. He is no more the Man she, and the other two women are waiting for. But look at the gentleness and warmth in her manners. She's still happy, as long as he is with her.

## SHE, A SUBJECT OR AN OBJECT?

Though she does speak sometimes, Ruan's silence is the more striking. In Lianhua Studio there rise overwhelming revolutionary dynamics: a group of young men come with the news of the Sep 18 Incident, the strike and the student movement. The atmosphere is hot, but Ruan comes out with extravagant make-up for the film "Peach Blossoms Weeping", with a naïve face painted snow-white. She looks at the excited people, without expression. Also, when she is asked to join singing the revolutionary song just composed by Nie Er, she only smiles, keeps silence as always. It seems that she is in the distance from outside the modernization discourse, and she remains mute later on. A woman without voice means absence, so where is she? Has she got her identity in a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society like Shanghai that time? Is she merely an object designed and manipulated by men, only sign in male-controlling film fantasy?

In real life never is she of narrative or enunciative centrality, as in the then silent films she has been mute. She's not exactly a "protagonist", yet, neither can we recognize any other omniscient narrator to tell story for her. Why? We see her in fact a subject without showing subjectivity intensively, we know she is not an object because sometimes she deliberately "choose[s] silence as a strategy for resisting dominance"<sup>3</sup>, by Tang or by Damin; also, because she doubtlessly knows, she understands, she forgives, and she endures. She feels inclined to get nobody disturbed for her sake, even when she's telling about Damin, she smiles. She smiles to say Damin is such a man who likes "easy free life" and cannot be bound with a family. When Damin sleeps like a dog deep at night, the camera gets a pan shot shifting across a large space of darkness to let us see her, who stays up late, gazing at Damin, thoughtful. She is always the one who is awake at mid-night.

She's a born mother although she cannot be a real one. She considers how painful it is for a woman to deliver birth, for she thinks the more painful it is, the more loving the mother will be. So she comes outside at night to lie in the snow to feel the cold, to bite her finger to feel the pain. So when she's committing suicide she says she loves Xiaoyu more than her own child. She does and she can, because she knows all the sufferings in this world so well, she knows how valuable life is, how it is to be cherished.

She keeps accounts. She sees anything. She is of highly sensitive consciousness. She distances herself from language, she's always static, silent, *she is not to make noise. Body is as her language*, her eyes are to observe. She does not join singing the *jinbu* song, but she volunteers to play the role of a revolutionary woman worker, a "stubborn girl daring to resist". Later she keeps playing "progressive roles" which "contrast sharply with her real life". For her subjectivity is just "indissoluble from the representation/figuration of the body"<sup>4</sup>, She achieves with her body her subjectivity by performing in the screen spatial realm, her "center stage". When not being filmed, her silence seems to be more powerful

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<sup>3</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, London/New York: Routledge, 1983. P. 102.

<sup>4</sup> Criselda Pollock, "Feminism/Foucault—Surveillance/Sexuality", pp.1-41, in Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (ed), *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, Hanover/London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994. P. 7.

resistance than “voice”, disrupts the male-controlling discourse economy<sup>5</sup>, especially her death. She chooses to die for she hates her locus as victim of “competitive exchange” between Tang and Damin<sup>6</sup>.

It is doubtlessly her “actions, gestures, body, and look that define the space of our vision, the temporality and rhythms of perception, the horizon of meaning available to the spectator.”<sup>7</sup> She becomes the dominant element in both the filmic texts and the context of her life—while with death, she is all for her self now, her identity, her unitary ego, autonomy and sovereignty, she now achieving absolute subjecthood.

## IS THE GAZE MALE?

As psychoanalysts proclaim the “gaze” is always male. The camera is the phallus held by man, the film is directed by man, the whole production are all by men. But as far as the real Ruan is concerned, the production team are planning and changing her into “a pure, chaste girl singer, a great mother of sacrifice”, or new woman daring to resist and struggle; they are to liberate her from an image of “bad woman with fascination. No roles are to make her in the locus of so-called eroticism, phonograph, or the Freudian concept fetishism, voyeurism linked to scopophilic instinct, and the spectators are in the least concerned with any sexual pleasure or self-identity detection, but they are asking: “What is being said about women here?”<sup>8</sup>

There are male gazes. In the film when Damin sees her for the first time, at that time he still wants her, he looks at her, desiring, but with a trace of cynicism. That’s already a distanced gaze. He does not love her any more; he’s addicted to gambling and obsessed with other women. Tang Jishan can be the only man giving the gaze in the sense of eroticism. He looks seekingly in the dancing, his mistress giving him a hateful glance, without saying anything. Another mute woman.

The dancing hall is where Ruan, forever in her curvaceous *qipao* in her slender exquisiteness, shows her most fascinating gentle grace and fluid female beauty. She is the real shining star. Tang cannot but notice her, he comes to dance beside her and gaze at her. He dares to gaze at any woman he wants at least because he’s a man; he identifies himself a subject so he is to desire.<sup>9</sup> Second, because he is the Tea King, he has money, thus a power, a sovereign. Ruan does not hate that, she even likes that: a woman is at her highest beauty when permeated with the loving gaze from a man she likes. How bewitchingly she dances from now on and how brilliantly she smiles! That’s the woman in love.

Also because she’s woman, she does not return the gaze. The second time they are sitting in the dancing hall, Tang gazes at her all the time and she is well aware of the gaze and she keeps looking in the other direction. The woman is always in distance, but she feels happy and she smiles. She is happy just because she is wanted, desired, and loved, the sense of love at least in her terms. Imagine the virgin Maria in the gaze of Jehovah.

The third man in her life is the *jinbu* director Cai Chusheng, who gets Ruan play the role of another woman film star who once played, wrote, and had no choice but turn into a prostitute for making a living, and finally committed suicide. He shows greatest sympathy and understanding towards the woman, and indignation towards the society’s being unfair to her. He says: “sometimes human beings are weak”. He crouches, mediates. It’s that Ruan comes to him and speaks to him.

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<sup>5</sup> Christine Gledhill, “Klutel: A Contemporary Film Noir and Feminist Criticism”, pp.20-34. in E. Ann Kaplan (ed), *Women in Film Noir*, London, British Film Institute, 1998. pp. 26-27. See the original: “...the male discourse loses control and the woman’s voice disrupts it”.

<sup>6</sup> Irigaray, Luce, *This Sex Which is not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, Ithaca/New York, Cornell University Press, 1985. p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, “Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women’s cinema” in E. Deidre Pribram (ed), *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*, London/New York: Verso, 1988. P. 178.

<sup>8</sup> Christine Gledhill, “Klutel: A Contemporary Film Noir and Feminist Criticism”, pp.20-34. in E. Ann Kaplan (ed), *Women in Film Noir*, London, British Film Institute, 1998. p.27.

<sup>9</sup> Lundgren-Gothlin, Eva, *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex*, trans. Linda Schenck, London, 1996. p.195.

Cai, crouching, looks up at Ruan. There are significant changes in his long gaze. Remember, when he first sees Ruan when all Lianhua people are taking a photo, he glances at Ruan and immediately he looks back at her once again. He is struck by the amazing beauty of her, maybe, as every spectator of whatever sex will. This time he is waken from random thoughts by Ruan. He looks at her, maybe is struck by her beauty once again, his gaze full of desire a man holds towards a beauty. Then he gazes at her as if studying her, curious. At last his gaze is warm, as of an old friend an old lover. He asks Ruan to crouch together with him to experience the feelings of the humble, the fragile people. They are at new terms with each other now.

Until now, no gaze from men is subversive. Until there's the man's gaze in another sense. Damin breaks into her new house one day as if a ghost, a nightmare refreshed. He demands that he be showed around. Ruan is the woman who seldom rejects. She leads him to see all the rooms, including the large bedroom of her and Tang Jishan, quite luxurious in Damin's eyes. The camera's shooting scans an angle of 180°, all around the room, slowly enough to show how Damin gazes at and examines her new life now. Downstairs in the sitting room the wall paper is with images of roses flowers, peach fruits, and grain ears, images of sweetness, harvest, love. Upstairs in the bedroom the wall paper is solely with rose flowers, yet rose flower images similar to vortexes, whirlpools, similar images to those of her Qipao she wears lately—she wears that Qipao and kills herself in this bedroom full of the roses—Damin cannot stand this. He is to destroy Ruan's new “home” and Ruan especially.

But Damin is at the most the “murder” starter. The movie is not in a simple feminist sense to identify man as the sole enemy the devil. There are female gaze quite more destructive: the woman peepers peeping into Ruan's new house from an opposite window (that's deliberately designed—Tang Jishan is wealthy enough to afford a house far away from the other lodgings to escape from the semiotic peep); the woman gossipers gossiping right in her back in the street when she's out of Damin's residence; the lady-dancers sleeping with Damin asking him about Ruan all the time, and at last, when Ruan in the restaurant, meeting with Cai Chusheng, the profiled woman with a hateful face, eyes following her all along. They are the murderers.

Although I am a woman myself, I feel reluctant but I feel obliged to and I dare say: it is women who are always suffering suppression of men and they struggle to hate that negative oppression, they sometimes stand up and stand out only to murder and kill their sisters.

Am I denouncing the old Feminism against men, shifting women's hatred into the other direction, women ourselves? Absolutely No.

Ruan is not killed by the women, for she demonstrates no intensive care and fear towards the women. We see her turning around to face the gossipers, we see her pay less notice to the peepers when moving into her new house. How strikingly contrasting the two scenes: when she opened the door, we spectate from a totally dark screen to a extremely bright sun-shining new space, her face shining most, a shining scene never has appeared and will never be. Now she turns, walking inside—the gigantic shadow is just inside.

## WHO KILLS HER?

She can ignore all if only she has the “home”, and she has a man there with her. She is finally killed by three men whom she loves who do not love her or not love her enough. Damin, her first lover, turns out to be Narcissus eventually, and an impotent one. In the hotel, a hung electric fan whirling just under the lamp, Damin plays with his hand imitating the whirling shadow of the fan, murmuring strangely: he is deep in his own obsession, he cares nothing of Ruan, he only wants to gamble and get money from her. He works him up to pretend to desire her and is of course rejected. He comes to lean idly before the mirror and says: “In fact I do not have interest...” He gazes at himself with eyes as if of a dead, very much like Narcissus<sup>10</sup>, exactly, the same sick-faced, the same decadent. He breathes at the mirror, makes a spot of mist, dimming his mouth image in the mirror. If she is the Echo, she cannot echo any more, for the now Narcissus loses his mouth and his voice. He is a dead man.

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<sup>10</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, book 3, trans. Frank Justus Miller, Cambridge/Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985. pp.151-159.

Tang Jishan gives her a home. At least he desires her. He seems a much decent and modernized gentleman. And he has everything to protect her: the scene he visits the shooting site of *Three Modern Women* is just implying: in the background is his cream-colored fancy car, he is the boss, he is followed by a servant who lights cigarette for him (the servant is not in the screen, only a hand seen. The screen is occupied by Tang.) He inspects the shooting and gazing at Ruan without hesitation. He desires her. But this desire is neither destructing Ruan until the newspapers have the news about her and Damin and Tang; Damin tells the world. She, the mute one, falls behind onto the chair, wailing like an animal, for the first time and the last.

She's suffering most, wondering why a former lover so ill-treats her. Yet when she faces him, she cannot pronounce forceful censure, she can only ask: "Damin, have I done anything wrong to you? Why you treat me like this?" Neither can she articulate the truth directly when Tang Jishan call her and himself "a couple noble adulterers". She makes sure at that moment that Tang gives her home only for desire but not love. She sits coolly before the mirror, with hands on knees, a pose a director teaches her to show resistance in performance.

She finally decides to turn to Cai Chusheng, the *jinbu* director. That must have been a hard decision for she has never before asked others for anything. She considers him her hope because he understands and sympathizes, shoots films to liberate women. Her discourse is never direct and forceful as in their last dialogue. Ruan asks whether Cai can take her to Hong Kong, she offers that they can get married, she questions if he minds "leaving his wife and his mistress". This *Jinbu* Cai now cannot stand her discourse and says: "You said you ask only about one issue." The dim light of his lighting a cigarette on her face now fades into shadow.

Damin is the man who's obsessed with his incomplete self (mouth lost), Tang Jishan is the man who only desires woman, but who is Cai Chusheng? Cai Chusheng is the man who has both desire and especially love and understanding towards woman, but he is a Man, he is the transcendent<sup>11</sup>. A Man is deemed to care his enterprise, his career, his fame, his work, his status, his future, everything to make him glorious, everything outside himself and the woman. Cai Chusheng says: "I've still got something to do here." *So He is never to sacrifice for the sake of Her, an Other.*

As a Woman, *Love is her religion and man is her God*. She wants a "home" just in order to sacrifice and worship. It is only "in love" that a woman "is fulfilled and is really attained; special, accepting a special destiny—and not floating rootless through the universe"<sup>12</sup>. Even if she owns a home as the temple, but for love's sake, it's fake. Now everything corrupts and collapses. She is to die.

## THE AESTHETICS OF FEMININITY AND DEATH

What a coincidence a wonder that the woman's surname Ruan—"阮" is pronounced exactly the same as "软", meaning "soft", "pliant" in Chinese; meanwhile, her "阮", with no specific meaning just as a surname, is formed with the left part of "耳", "ear", the right one "元", "origin". Ruan's great beauty typical of oriental women virtues just lies in her being "mute", in her listening attentively to others with "ears", and this quietness and calmness is taken as "origin" of lives and the universe in East philosophy.

We see her beauty as if transparent, as well as her quietness, her being "clear as ice pure as jade"; also we see her soul: she's "undoubtedly a mother...a virgin mother."<sup>13</sup> She is just what she depicts a young girl in *Gimmicks*: nice, clever, considerate, thoughtful; she endures her pains, struggles to smile to comfort others. She knows all the sufferings in this world so that she can play the suffering woman roles perfect. She is of all traditional virtues except that she's involved with three men without marriage.

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<sup>11</sup> Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex* (ed. & trans. H. M. Parshley), London, 1968. P.279.

<sup>12</sup> Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex* (ed. & trans. H. M. Parshley), London, 1968. p.263.

<sup>13</sup> Irigaray, Luce, *This Sex Which is not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, Ithaca/New York, Cornell University Press, 1985. p.30.

She is all the way the mute especially in the films then soundless. But there is microphone finally installed to make image-sound-synchronizing films and she is to be the first female star to speak Mandarin; she can speak from now on, both with her image and “her sound”. Also she’s to give a speech the next day, Women’s Day, she is to announce that the Chinese women stand up now from men’s five Millennia oppression. But still she chooses to stay mute, for as woman, she “is doomed to immanence...she bestows peace and harmony”.<sup>14</sup>

She is the mute, but she is always a mirror with reflections most clear. She’s the mirror without noise, the woman in the distance, the woman so gentle yet enduring all. Her deep understanding, her keen awareness and consciousness, her suppressed pains and her quietness, her “sound absence”, serves right as “a precondition for [her] image’s irresistible allure”,<sup>15</sup> are all the way driving spectators into tears. The exquisite silhouette of the real Ruan Lingyu sets the soft tune of the whole film. She’s a gentle angel, the incarnation of Eastern feminine gentle beauty. She fulfills her womanly heroism through her endurance and she endures quietly. Nevertheless, she can never join the radical Feminism, she is never “a woman who aspires to be like a man”.<sup>16</sup> Even she’s already granted “enlightenment about herself.”<sup>17</sup>

## TOWARDS A NEW “ORIENTAL” FEMININISM

*Ruan Lingyu* as a film conveys honest, complete, accurate representation of “the ‘real’ experiences of a concrete woman”<sup>18</sup>, not “partial”, not “one-sided”, not “a negation” of a definition” of woman. It’s just showing “women as women”, or woman “as fully human”<sup>19</sup>.

Cai Chusheng could have been Ruan’s *jiuxing*, savior, or redeemer. As Simone de Beauvoir says, “women crouches on earth, beneath [man’s] feet”, but Cai is the man who crouches first and asks Ruan to crouch beside him. He is not Tang Jishan: never does Tang “lower himself down to her”. Ruan takes the revenge: when at the night she’s to die, he falls to the dancing floor, she goes on dancing indifferently. But Cai as well as Tang “raises her up to him, takes her, and then throws her back”<sup>20</sup>, even in a more cruel sense, for he means “love” to her. Love is her faith, her religion, she is non-existent without him, her God, she “is anyway doomed to dependence”; she loves to “humble herself to nothingness before him”.<sup>21</sup>

But the never-can-be-solved problem here forever is: man is transcendent, he asserts his freedom and transcendence, “he soars in the sky of heroes”,<sup>22</sup> he throws her back into Otherness, helps her to be confined inside immanence. So the woman dies into eternal immanence as might be liked by him. Eve let Adams eat that apple. But still Adams’s sons are caring nothing about Eve’s daughters.

Thus I am here to initiate a new Femininism, not at all in the sense of radical Feminism to fight for simply equality, liberation, to fight against man, his oppression, but just to call for attention towards a different unhappiness of women who already “holds half the sky”, who even have been granted position in the “center stage”: they may suffer not so much from patriarchy from non-freedom as from non-love.

If, I have to call it an “Oriental Femininism”, I am trying to examine the whole issue from the perspective of a distorted “biological determinism”: Eastern women are more biologically fragile, more delicate, more sensitive, thus more afraid of midnight cold, quiet, solitary, void, as a result, she needs man more—yet there

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<sup>14</sup> Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex* (ed. & trans. H. M. Parshley), London, 1968. p.278.

<sup>15</sup> Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women’s Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Berkley/Los Angeles/Oxford, University of California Press, 1991. p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Derrida, Jacques, *Spurs*, trans. Barbara Harlow, London/Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978. P. 65.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, P. 67.

<sup>18</sup> Christine Gledhill, “Women and Representation”, pp. 817-845, in Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen (ed), *Film Theory and Criticism*, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985. p. 818.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Cowie, “Woman as a Sign”, in *M/F*, No. 1, 1978. p. 50.

<sup>20</sup> Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex* (ed. & trans. H. M. Parshley), London, 1968. p. 279.

<sup>21</sup> Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex* (ed. & trans. H. M. Parshley), London, 1968. pp. 652-653.

<sup>22</sup> Beauvoir, Simone de, *The Second Sex* (ed. & trans. H. M. Parshley), London, 1968. P.279.

have been more Chinese “Joans of Arc” and the Chinese women now are the “half sky”; if in term of psychoanalysis, all through the solid even extreme patriarchal economy of millennia, the image of a “father” has come to be more powerful, more fascinating, more inaccessible, more admirable, thus there should be the easier trajectory of daughter Oedipal complex. However, the Chinese history is so enlightened with Confucianism concepts of *tianlun*, *lunli*, there is seldom this psychoanalytic trap imaginable. Father is just father in eyes of Chinese daughters. This is never “excessive sexual license attributed to the western feminist”<sup>23</sup>, it’s a matter of fact, and we are saying this without considering whoever is the Subject, or, the Other.<sup>24</sup>

However, this is not the Chinese attempt to “construct a new femininity”<sup>25</sup>, for femininity is eternal, as long as the human remain one kind of animals; this is not “our” “post-colonial abhorrence of the ‘immorality’”, not at all “anathema to western feminism”, yet this is “to resist ‘globalising’ tendencies”<sup>26</sup> of an “international feminism” in a monolithic context, not in term of “western Subject” and “third world Other”, not that the “third world” Woman is “the difference and the deviation”<sup>27</sup>. There does exist the idea that “a certain image of “Woman” that is the culturally dominant model for female identity”<sup>28</sup>. Nevertheless, We have already the western concept “biology-is-destiny” of gender, we have at least Simone de Beauvoir. What I am saying here is: femininity is universal.

The critical issue here is a new, more accurate “division” between women, not that women are divided into the “worlds” they belong to, but into groups of “different women”. At stake is an understanding of what Rosi Braidotti calls “sexual difference level two”, “differences among women”<sup>29</sup>. Because “Woman is a general umbrella term that brings together different kinds of women...different identities.”<sup>30</sup> Also, there is Teresa de Lauretis who appeals “a better understanding of the difference of women from Woman...the differences among women”<sup>31</sup>. We as well have Derrida articulating “woman is (her own) writing, style must return to her.”<sup>32</sup> Only if we understand the very style of Ruan Lingyu can we understand there are other women in this world of this very style of beauty: silent, quiet, peaceful, gentle, in her elegant gracefulness, her feminine fluidity, remaining in shadow where light rises, remaining in the distance from the noisy, remaining “mute”, like a “sailing ship” with “ghostly beauty”, “like an immense butterfly, passes over the dark sea”!<sup>33</sup> Really there are “women invisible to men...also women who are invisible to other women”<sup>34</sup>—yes, here are the mute among women, there are women who are totally emancipated yet especially unhappy, yet invisible to women of radical Feminists who aspire to be men<sup>35</sup>, who give “happiness in the calm in the distance”<sup>36</sup>, who I believe account for not a small percentage: feminism as well as democracy, general human rights should not be of or for only those a few who take demonstration, who shout and yell, it should be of all “female” “people”. How about a global vote for radical Feminism and Femininism?

<sup>23</sup> Antonia Finnane and Anne McLaren, Introduction, pp. i-xxiii, in Antonia Finnane and Anne McLaren (ed), *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture*, Clayton, Monash Asia Institute, 1999. p. xvi.

<sup>24</sup> I don’t know why “they” are so sensitive to their being called “they”. But what else can we call “them”? What about a “the Western ‘we’”?

<sup>25</sup> Antonia Finnane and Anne McLaren, Introduction, pp. i-xxiii, in Antonia Finnane and Anne McLaren (ed), *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture*, Clayton, Monash Asia Institute, 1999. p. xvi-xix.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.xviii.

<sup>27</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, p. 346.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.276.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.279.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p34.

<sup>31</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, “Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women’s cinema” in E. Deidre Pribram (ed), *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*, London/New York: Verso, 1988. P. 183.

<sup>32</sup> Derrida, Jacques, *Spurs*, trans. Barbara Harlow, London/Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. p. 57.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>34</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, “Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women’s cinema” in E. Deidre Pribram (ed), *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*, London/New York: Verso, 1988. P. 183.

<sup>35</sup> Derrida, Jacques, *Spurs*, trans. Barbara Harlow, London/Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. p 65.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.45.



If a must it is for “Oriental Femininism”, we may follow the three Eastern ideological categories: first, the Eastern extreme value of spirit, soul: love is high above sex<sup>37</sup>. Second, China has no religion in serious sense, only Taoism and the borrowed Buddhism; there is no God, thus, or perhaps because, Man is the God. Third, the highest realm of Eastern aesthetics of silence, *hanxu, yunjie*, its “quiet beauty”, conforming right to what is believed femininity. That beauty “without noise” “in the distance” Derrida sings ardently of is just in the Chinese Painting the blank left as *liu bai*. An Eastern woman prefers to be like *xiao niao yi ren* (attached to man like a little bird), because she needs to admire, because her definition of love is more sacred, higher, because love means to her to sacrifice, then she must sacrifice to a God, on the altar, in the temple: home.

There is “Feminism” for the women who want to be men, so there should be a Femininism” for the other women who want to be women. “Oriental Femininism” is not but for Oriental women (some of them are absolutely against it), it is for the whole world women. Femininism is closer to a scientific attitude: it allows the real existence, it is against tyranny, monologue; Femininism is more of Humanitarianism: Humanitarianism is to give what’s needed, accordingly: we offer bread to the hungry, we listen to the less fortunate, we guess what the miserable suffer. So, men, as if God should give those who pray an understanding of their piety, should give—return women *understanding*<sup>38</sup> *of women’s sacrifice and their beauty*, men should give women *love*. As long as the day has not come finally when it is not the male cuckoo is singing and the female cuckoo is echoing the male-female natural laws there can not be an ultimate “universal” triumph of radical Feminism, and this formerly mute “femininist” voice should not fade into muteness again. In no sense is this Femininism to educate women into echoing men, it is to understand the silent, the never pronouncing, boundless sufferings in no light, never pronounced by patriarchy, also never pronounced by certain Feminism. It is to sing ode to the aesthetics blossoming in peace, tranquility, eternity. Eve is a woman restless; Chang’e is a woman adventurous; Nuwa is creative, Debora is scheming, but the holy virgin mother, standing forever for feminine Nature as the grand tranquility the grand power, she never speaks.

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<sup>37</sup> As Wang Anyi is cited that “the Chinese maintain a morally higher life...Westerners separate their emotions from sex...we will only have sex when our emotions reach a high level of intensity. That seems to be a really big difference” in Wang Zheng, “Three Interviews: Wang Anyi, Zhu Lin, Dai Qing”, pp.159-208, in Barlow, Tani E. (ed) *Gender, Politics in Modern China: Writing and Feminism*, Durham/London: Duke University Press, 1993, p.171.

<sup>38</sup> See also in Ding Ling’s *Miss Sophia’s Diary*, Sophia’s desperate desire for men’s “understanding”.

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